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"A TYPICAL SOIL CONSERVATION PROJECT:  
INDIAN CREEK, HAMILTON, OHIO"

Broadcast No. 2 in a series  
of discussions of soil con-  
servation in the Ohio Valley.

WLW, Cincinnati

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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE  
Dayton, Ohio



SOUND: Heavy rain...

MUSIC: Fading...

ANNOUNCER

Fortunes Washed Away!

MUSIC: Fading...

ANNOUNCER

In 1828, General Andrew Jackson stood on a high point in the Appalachian mountains. His back was to the East, an East already partially impoverished by cropping and erosion. Looking out across the vast forests and prairies which stretched endlessly westward, Jackson talked with a friend...

JACKSON

From here out to the Mississippi River there is enough good land, to take care of all the population we will have in the United States for the next 700 years. It's a most spacious habitation for human life...

MUSIC: Fading...

ANNOUNCER

This valley, we know today as the Corn Belt. When Mad Anthony Wayne led his plucky pioneer soldiers into Butler county, Ohio--into this same belt--they found a broad fertile valley carpeted with grass, the hills and ridges covered with hardwood timber. Here they settled...

PIONEER

This is the place. Wayne and St. Clair have made friends with the Indians.....So.....this is our new home! Well, food, clothing, and a log cabin is all I need. Here's where we start! Where's my axe...

SOUND: Chopping of tree, gradually drowned out by

MUSIC: Fading...





ANNOUNCER

Thirty years later, livestock farming became prominent.

Cincinnati, the "Porkopolis" of that day, provided a convenient market. Clearing of the trails and development of transportation methods led the early farmers to mine their soil, to rush the products to market. Truly, here was a rich agricultural land...

PIONEER

Look at that! This is a lot different than the thin soil we were used to back home. You should have seen the corn I grew here last year, Martha, and look down yonder into the valley... stalks 14 feet high! This is corn land...

MUSIC: Fading...

ANNOUNCER

Enthusiastic, perhaps the early settlers did exaggerate their reports...but, by and large, the land was indeed a welcome reward for the long journey through the forests. Back home went thrilling reports of the newly-discovered Utopia...

GIRL (reading a letter)

Here's what he says, mother! "The region is a veritable paradise, with the richest and deepest garden mould."

SOUND: Throwing down paper, girl jumping to her feet and running across room...

GIRL

Oh, mother! I'd like to go out there! The romance of it! You know what Colonel May said when he came back to Virginia last year. Remember? He told us about one man growing 700 bushels of corn on a seven-acre patch...

MUSIC: Fading...





ANNOUNCER

Settlers found similar conditions throughout the Corn Belt. A hopeful note was voiced by Governor Whitcomb of Indiana, who said in 1843...

WHITCOMB

Our position, soil, and climate, point to agriculture as our chief reliance for lasting wealth and prosperity!...

MUSIC: Fading...

ANNOUNCER

But the frontier had bounds. Exuberant, impatient, and over-optimistic about the inexhaustibility of its natural resources, the pioneers literally burned away the forests. Wheat acreage, during the World War, was pushed up on slopes that had never been broken by the plow. In 1935, in the Soil Conservation Service office at Zanesville, Ohio, J. S. Cutler called a meeting of his staff...

SOUND: Faint shuffling of feet, quiet conversation in background (not more than 6 persons)

CUTLER

We've been working here in Muskingum county for a little more than a year. You know what's happened. It's no secret that I'm proud of the way farmers here in Salt Creek have taken to erosion control, once they found out that it can be done without a lot of money or technical knowledge. Well, the soil conservation work has only started.

JERRY

Does that mean that we'll put in another project?

CUTLER

Well, Jerry, it does if there's a need for it.



JERRY

Then you'd better start considering Butler county. The farmers over there are beginning to ask for help. I was talking to G. W. Conrey at Ohio State about that the other day. Conrey is anxious for us to do some work in Butler county.

CUTLER

Well, what do the soil surveys show about Butler county? I know the pastures are getting washed rather badly over there.

JERRY

I've got that dope right here. Just a minute...

SOUND: Rustling of papers.

JERRY

Here it is. The original topsoil in the area was from 12 to 14 inches deep. Good crops were common until the fertility was partially depleted, the soil washed, and clover failures became more and more numerous. Conrey's soil survey shows serious erosion in the Indian Creek drainage, particularly.

CUTLER

All right, Jerry. Suppose you go in there and make a conservation survey and see what you find out...

MUSIC: Fading...

ANNOUNCER

The area was surveyed. It was estimated that from 50 to 75 percent of the surface soil on the uplands had been washed away, that over most of the area the farmers now had less than 7 inches of topsoil upon which to farm. In 100 years, erosion had taken half of the topsoil!

MUSIC: Fading...



ANNOUNCER

Thus, to a 30,000-acre watershed touching the rolling border line of Ohio and Indiana came a typical Soil Conservation Service demonstration project. Not all farmers welcomed the strange project with strange ideas. Take Earl Creek, for instance...

SOUND: Tractor idling...

BARNEY

Hello, Earl!

SOUND: Tractor cuts off.

CREEK

Hello, Barney.

BARNEY

Looks like you've got most of it broken. How's the tractor working?

CREEK

It's working all right. I ought to get finished on this field by dark.

BARNEY

Yes, and I see you're going up and down hill, too. What about plowing it on the contour like I mentioned?

CREEK

Barney, I've been thinking over that plan you worked out for me. I just can't see it. May be all right for some fellows, but not me. I don't like the idea of crooked rows...

MUSIC: Fading...





ANNOUNCER

But Barney met that objection. He showed Earl Creek that farming on the contour, or true level of the land, sets up a series of miniature earth dams to slow the moving water...that contour cultivation is easy on the tractor, because there is less uphill pull...but there were other objections...Barney suggested that too much of the sloping land was in corn...

CREEK

I don't want to cut down on corn. I'm growing just about enough corn right now, and you want me to take corn off of that steep slope there and put it in alfalfa and timothy pasture...

ANNOUNCER

Earl Creek is an intelligent, progressive, Butler county farmer. When Barney showed him that, by putting each acre to its proper use, by using longer rotations which included legumes, he could increase the yield of corn on the land suitable for row-crop cultivation, Earl agreed...

CREEK

Barney, maybe you're right. But really, I don't have much erosion. Not a real serious gully on the place.

ANNOUNCER

Barney took him to a nearby fence-row. With a spade, he dug down into the earth. Here, where the plow had spared the land, nearly a foot of topsoil remained. Not so on the cultivated land. So, when Earl Creek began to study the matter he was convinced he did have a serious erosion problem. He was among the first to sign a cooperative agreement with the new soil conservation project. His 1938 farming operations include such soil-saving measures as reforestation, improved crop rotations, sod waterways, liming and fertilizing, pasture improvement, and contour cultivation...





MUSIC: Fading...

ANNOUNCER

That is how a typical soil conservation project got its start. Thousands of farmers have scoffed at the idea that their sloping lands were washing away, that they were robbing their children of their heritage...through fortunes washed away. But in Indian Creek, in Butler county, Ohio, some 100 cooperating farmers have adopted prudent tillage methods to safeguard the nation's heritage, their most priceless possession, the soil!

MUSIC: Fading...

ANNOUNCER

The Indian Creek demonstration project of the Soil Conservation Service is one of 175 erosion control areas in the United States, and here is Ewing Jones, of the Dayton, Ohio, office, to carry on.

JONES

By carry on, \_\_\_\_\_, just what do you mean?

ANNOUNCER

I thought you might tell us a little more about what has been done in some of the soil conservation projects. I imagine a good many of our listeners are on farms and who knows, some day I might have a farm myself.

JONES

If you have, \_\_\_\_\_, take a tip and protect your sloping fields. Remember that soil leaves the farm on a one-way ticket. But getting back to the "typical project," as we might call the one in Butler county, there was a serious need for it.



ANNOUNCER

From what we've said already, I can see that there was an erosion problem there.

JONES

And of course there still is. It takes years to correct land misuse. The farmers are correcting it though. For one thing, they're taking better care of their pastures and meadows. They're practicing rotational grazing more than in the past.

ANNOUNCER

That's a good sign. But how about the corn fields? Continuous corn production undoubtedly was one of the chief causes of the erosion problem there.

JONES

Yes, it was. You might be interested to know that the average corn yield in the Indian Creek area is 38 bushels an acre--and that's a bit different from the 100 bushels the early settlers reported. Remember, too, that this decline is in spite of the introduction of improved crop strains, fertilizers, better farming equipment, and better seed bed preparation methods.

ANNOUNCER

Then what's to be the final solution? I guess you can answer that question by telling us just what the Butler county project is doing.

JONES

In a way, yes. The long-time goal of the project, naturally, is to establish a complete demonstration of proper soil conservation methods applicable to this part of the Corn Belt. Chief among those methods are the introduction of a better land use program, including more legumes in the rotation, and using longer rotations--that'll take care of the corn-corn-corn problem.





ANNOUNCER

And by land use you mean--maybe you'd better explain that. I know that land use covers a lot of territory.

JONES

Well, to boil it down, by land use I mean to put trees on slopes best suited for trees, put pastures or meadows on the land best suited for sod, and to keep row crops on the less sloping land.

ANNOUNCER

Are farmers doing that? I don't mean to appear arbitrary; I'm just asking. A demonstration won't mean so much in the long run if farmers outside of the area don't pick up these methods.

JONES

That's one of the most encouraging signs. Sid Parish, the project manager, said just the other day that more and more farmers are adopting soil-saving measures, particularly better crop rotations. And they're paying more attention to their gullies. I'd like to mention Arthur Dare.

ANNOUNCER

Is Arthur Dare one of your cooperators?

JONES

Not at first, he wasn't. He is now. Mr. Dare wasn't particularly interested in soil conservation until he saw a terraced field on a neighbor's farm. He stopped, and, when he saw how the terraces were stopping soil and water losses, he wanted one of his fields treated that way. Mr. Dare is one of our best cooperators now. I could cite thousands of other farmers who have adopted the conservation farming pattern.

ANNOUNCER

I'm glad to see that farmers are adopting, or shall we say weaving, this changing pattern of agriculture.





JONES

It is gratifying. We can't do much about how much rain falls, but we can do a lot about what happens to the rain after it hits the ground. And now, \_\_\_\_\_, with your permission, I'd like to introduce Robert Allen. Bob Allen is an engineer from the Dayton office. He's been particularly interested in rainfall records, and all that. How about it, Bob?

ALLEN

I certainly am interested in rainfall records, Ewing. You'll recall our conversation with W. C. Devereaux?

JONES

I do. He's the Cincinnati meteorologist, or weather man, if you don't mind.

ALLEN

Then you'll recall that Mr. Devereaux agreed that it's not the amount of rain that falls during the year that's important, but how it comes, and when it comes.

JONES

You left yourself open for a question there. In Butler county, how and when does it come?

ALLEN

I'll have to fall back on Mr. Devereaux for the answer to that. You know, it's surprising the amount of information you can get from the Weather Bureau. Well, in Butler county, the rain comes in downpours. Sometimes it doesn't come at all. For example, in one August an inch and a half fell. The next August, the county received more than nine inches. You see, it's how it falls, and the season in which it falls, that causes a good deal of our erosion.



JONES

Yes, I think I see that.

ALLEN

Here's just an example. London, England, gets only about 26 inches of rain each year. Butler county usually gets around 42. England's rains are frequent. It seems to rain almost every day, but the rains are usually gentle. It's different in Butler county. When it rains there, it really rains. In fact, it usually pours. Fortunately, farmers are learning what to do with the rain after it falls. They're learning to keep it where it falls, instead of sending it down Indian Creek, the Miami River, the Ohio, the Mississippi, and out to sea.

ANNOUNCER

Well, maybe we'd better get off the rain topic before we have a cloudburst.

JONES

One more thing, \_\_\_\_\_.

ANNOUNCER

All right.

JONES

We still have a few copies of the bulletin entitled "Conserving Corn Belt Soil." I'll send a copy to anyone that's interested in soil conservation. Write Soil Conservation, Dayton, Ohio. Here, \_\_\_\_\_, is a copy. I just wish you'd read that closing paragraph.

ANNOUNCER

Certainly.

JONES

I mean out loud.



ANNOUNCER

Soil lost from the land cannot be returned. Nature can build new soil, but only with the tediousness of centuries. Our problem is to live on the good soil that remains, to defend it as we use it, and to leave it so that succeeding generations may also live upon it. There is no time for regret of past mistakes. We must appraise wisely our opportunities in the use of land and make the most of them.

MUSIC: Blending into...

SOUND: Rain...

ANNOUNCER

This is an educational presentation of the Nation's Station.

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